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Helping Physics Students Thrive

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Over the past five years, university education has undergone significant transformation. The lingering effects of COVID lockdowns have reduced student attendance, while the widespread availability of AI tools has made it easier for students to outsource the cognitive effort behind many assessments. These shifts have contributed to increased isolation, declining wellbeing, and a rise in mental health concerns. As a result, student engagement has diminished, negatively impacting learning outcomes for many.

While our teaching methods have had to adapt to this new reality, some core goals remain unchanged. We continue to strive for deep understanding of fundamental physics principles - a pursuit that remains both challenging and rewarding for engaged students. Importantly, students are still people with enduring psychological needs: a sense of belonging, a desire for mastery, and autonomy. Yet, in our efforts to be flexible and efficient, we may inadvertently undermine these needs by prioritising convenience over connection, competence, and academic challenge.

In this talk, I will explore how we can help physics students thrive by returning to the foundational elements of good education: a well-designed curriculum, meaningful assessment and grading aligned with learning outcomes and academic integrity, and opportunities for students to build relationships with staff and peers. I will share strategies that can be implemented at the individual, departmental, and university levels to support student engagement, wellbeing, and learning.

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